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Laurierism and the Empire



The Extraordinary Record of Some Past Performances of Rt. Hon. Sir Wilfrid Laurier

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A Long Series of Anti-British and Anti-Imperial Deeds and Declarations



Ottawa, 1909?

Laurierism and the Empire

The heavy responsibility for Canada's unreadiness to aid Great Britain on the sea rests upon one man. That responsibility cannot be obliterated by tardy professions of patriotism at a time when professions count for little and preparedness counts for much. The Laurier, who, when the enemy stands knocking at the gate, runs to cover under a declaration of devotion to the Motherland, is the Laurier, who, during the whole of his long public career, preached and practiced inaction, neutrality, desertion; who, time after time, refused the aid which the Canadian people stood ready to give, who held the Dominion back from any form of participation in naval defence, who held out to the enemies of England the promise that Canadian ships would never be found in the Empire's fleet.

In the first sea fight of the war the dreadnought battleship of the little Dominion of New Zealand was found on the firing line, splendidly aiding in the Empire's defence.

No ship from Canada was there. Why?

Remember that the killing of the Borden Naval Aid Bill by Laurier was no isolated act, but the shameful climax of a long series of anti-British and anti-Imperial deeds and declarations extending over a period of nearly fifty years.

During all that period the Laurier influence was ever found on the side of separation and against co-operation by the British dominions in either commerce or defence. At times he yielded to the overwhelming force of public sentiment, but he yielded unwillingly, grudgingly, protesting. He will base his defence today upon these few instances of compliance with a force that he could not stay.

Laurier's one sound claim to consistency is based upon his steadfast opposition to any and all forms of united action by the Dominions of the Empire, a claim which in this hour of struggle and sacrifice he dare not make.

Opposed Confederation

He opposed confederation of the colonies of British North America before he opposed co-operation by the scattered states of the Empire. When the greatest Canadians were striving in the face of tremendous obstacles to bring about the Canadian confederation, Laurier was in the field fighting against them. He called upon the people of Lower Canada to prevent the union, declaring that,—

"That is not the way we politicians of the Papineau school look at the matter; when any change whatsoever is proposed in our political or social institutions, we do not look to see whether this change will be of use to the English Colonies or to any other neighbor; WE THINK ONLY OF LOWER CANADA AND OF THE FRENCH RACE."

He was more outspoken then than he would dare be today. He was no less un-British in thought when he killed the Naval Aid Bill than he was frankly un-British in speech when he said,

"WE HAVE NOTHING IN COMMON WITH THE ENGLISH COLONIES, except that we are all dependent upon the same metropolis."

In another statement he was even more frank :—

"WE DO NOT CARE A FIG FOR THE ENGLISH COLONIES, NOVA SCOTIA, NEW BRUNSWICK, PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND, NEWFOUNDLAND."

The Laurier who paralysed the arm which Canada had stretched out for the Empire's defence in 1912-13 was the same Laurier who boldly proclaimed in 1885 that,—

"IF HE HAD BEEN ON THE BANKS OF THE SASKATCHEWAN WHEN THE REBELLION BROKE OUT HE WOULD HAVE TAKEN UP ARMS AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT."

Sympathised with the Rebels

The events of 1885 are still well within the memory of a living generation. Canadians of today look back with pride to the part they or their fathers played in the suppression of the

Riel rebellion, a rebellion against British authority, a rebellion in which loyal white settlers on the Red River, men, women and children, lost their lives. Loyal Canadians laid down their lives willingly in those days as they are doing today, defending their homes and the flag then as now, but Laurier would, on his own confession, have fought with the rebels, and he characterized as "a judicial murder" the just punishment of the rebel leader.

The same spirit prompted him a few years later, in 1888, 1889 and 1890, to launch upon his campaign for a commercial alliance with the United States. The Canadian people were to throw in their lot with the United States and turn their backs on England. The method was that of unrestricted reciprocity in trade, a method which would have paved the way to a political union if the other parties to the proposal had had their way. Laurier aimed at a commercial union with people who aimed at a political union, and who demurred at the preliminary step, asking "what is the use of making two bites of the one cherry?"

Defeated in this, he threw off the mask entirely, and we find him, in 1891, assuring the people of Boston, amid the applause of his listeners, that Canada would not much longer remain in bondage to Britain,—

"THE ONLY TIE THAT BINDS CANADA TO THE MOTHER COUNTRY IS A SENTIMENT OF AFFECTION. But this dependence will not always last. Even now Canada and England have very different interests, and a day will come—necessarily—when they will have to part."

Openly Preached Independence

Encouraged by the reception of his utterances in the United States, he grew bolder, and in the following year, from his place in the House of Commons, he openly preached Canadian independence. He said:—

"I HOLD OUT TO MY FELLOW-COUNTRYMEN THE IDEA OF INDEPENDENCE, but, whenever the day comes, it must come by the consent of both countries, and we shall continue to keep the good feeling and good-will of the motherland. If we are true to our record we will again exhibit to the world the unique, the unprecedented example of a nation ACHIEVING ITS INDEPENDENCE BY SLOW DEGREES AND AS NATURALLY AS THE SEVERING OF THE RIPE FRUIT FROM THE PARENT TREE."

"IS THERE A CANADIAN ANYWHERE WHO WOULD NOT HAIL WITH JOY THE DAY WHEN WE WOULD BE DEPRIVED OF THE SERVICES OF BRITISH DIPLOMACY!"

"I am ready any day, whether I am charged with annexation or not, to take a Yankee dollar in preference to an English shilling. . . . I HAVE AGAIN AND AGAIN REPEATED THAT THE GOAL OF MY ASPIRATION IS THE INDEPENDENCE OF CANADA, TO SEE CANADA AN INDEPENDENT NATION IN DUE COURSE OF TIME."

His excuse now is that he was then in his green and salad days, but it is not so long ago, and the words uttered then were little worse in the letter and no worse in the spirit than words uttered by himself and his friends day by day and week by week in the fight against the Naval Aid Bill only eighteen months ago.

Heading a government in 1896, and clothed with the responsibilities of office, he became a little less outspoken, but never less determined.

The South African War

The outbreak of war in South Africa placed Laurier in a dilemma. The Mother Country was engaged in a difficult task. Public feeling was running high in Canada. The demand for the raising of a Canadian contingent for service in South Africa was growing. Laurier held back. He could not see how Canada could come to the aid of Great Britain; he could not see the necessity for it, and one of his leading supporters came out with the declaration, "Not a man, not a gun."

Laurier blocked the movement so long as he dared. He said:—

"There is no menace to Canada, and although we may be willing to contribute troops, I DO NOT SEE HOW WE CAN DO SO."

His hand was forced. All that is comparatively recent history. The Government was compelled, by pressure of an angry public opinion, to raise and equip Canadian contingents. The real enemies of the Empire at that time are the open enemies of the Empire today. It is an open secret that the South African republics were egged on and encouraged to make war on Great Britain by the German Emperor. It has been an open secret for years that the German Empire aimed at the destruction of the British Empire and was preparing for war. The strong shield of the Empire is the British fleet. Germany strained every nerve to create a fleet which would be strong enough to engage the British fleet and destroy it. The people of Great Britain were making heavy sacrifices toward the up-

keep of the navy and the maintenance of a margin of safety in the number of ships. Other British Dominions announced their willingness to share in the burden of naval defence, and made good their assurances.

Canada, under Laurier, did nothing.

At the Imperial Conference

In 1902 and in 1907 the question of overseas participation in Imperial Naval Defence was under discussion. Sir Wilfrid Laurier, as Canadian Prime Minister, was present at those conferences. He was eloquent in his expressions of loyalty, but stubbornly determined in his refusals to act.

At the Imperial Conference in London in May, 1907, Dr. Smartt, Premier of Cape Colony, moved the following resolution:

"That this Conference, recognizing the vast importance of the services rendered by the navy to the defence of the Empire and the protection of its trade, and the paramount importance of continuing to maintain the navy in the highest possible state of efficiency, considers it to be THE DUTY OF THE DOMINIONS BEYOND THE SEAS TO MAKE SUCH CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS THE UPKEEP OF THE NAVY, AS MAY BE DETERMINED BY THEIR LOCAL LEGISLATURES—the contribution to take the form of a grant of money, the establishment of local naval defence, or such other services, IN SUCH MANNER AS MAY BE DECIDED UPON AFTER CONSULTATION WITH THE ADMIRALTY AND AS WOULD BEST ACCORD WITH THEIR VARYING CIRCUMSTANCES."

Sir Wilfrid Laurier, speaking on this resolution, said:—

"I AM SORRY TO SAY SO FAR AS CANADA IS CONCERNED WE CANNOT AGREE TO THE RESOLUTION. For my part, if the motion were pressed to a conclusion, I SHOULD HAVE TO VOTE AGAINST IT."

Dr. Smartt—*"I think it is a great pity we do not pass something. WE HAVE DONE SO MUCH IN THE WAY OF PIOUS AFFIRMATION THAT I AM ANXIOUS WE SHOULD DO SOMETHING OF A PRACTICAL CHARACTER."*

Sir Wilfrid Laurier—*"It can be passed if there is a majority. FOR MY PART I MUST VOTE AGAINST IT."*

Further on Sir Wilfrid Laurier said:—

"We, of the different Dominions beyond the seas, have tried to be unanimous up to the present time. I am sorry to say this is a question upon which we could not be unanimous. Therefore Dr.

Smartt can move it if he chooses, or withdraw it. BUT IF HE PRESSES IT I SHOULD HAVE TO VOTE AGAINST IT.

Dr. Smartt's resolution was withdrawn owing solely to the attitude of Sir Wilfrid Laurier.

Refused to Co-operate

At the conference of 1909 all of the self-governing dominions, with the exception of the richest and most powerful—Canada—ranged themselves on the side of the Empire. Each undertook a share in the burden of naval defence. Laurier **stood out**. The Admiralty asked for co-operative action in the building of fleet units. Laurier **refused**. He offered instead the miserable proposal of a little Canadian navy of four light cruisers and six destroyers split up, part on the Atlantic and part on the Pacific.

Australia and New Zealand went loyally forward in the building of dreadnoughts and destroyers, and their fleets are now taking a prominent and important part in the war.

The Laurier Government went out of office in the fall of 1911 without having let the contract for a single ship.

The Laurier navy, as described by Laurier, was to be in no sense an Imperial navy. It was to fight by order-in-council, and might not fight at all. Canada, according to Laurier, might be neutral with the rest of the Empire at war. This was plainly stated in the House of Commons on April 19 in reply to a series of questions from the then Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Borden:—

"Mr. R. L. Borden—Would the right hon. gentleman permit me to ask him a question? Suppose a Canadian ship meets a ship of similar armament and power belonging to an enemy, meets her on the high seas, what is she to do? I do not ask now what she will do, if attacked; but WILL SHE ATTACK, WILL SHE FIGHT?

"Sir Wilfrid Laurier—I DO NOT KNOW THAT SHE WILL FIGHT. I DO NOT KNOW THAT SHE SHOULD FIGHT EITHER. SHE SHOULD NOT FIGHT UNTIL THE GOVERNMENT BY WHICH SHE IS COMMISSIONED HAVE DETERMINED WHETHER SHE SHOULD GO INTO THE WAR. That is the position we take, my hon. friend takes a different position. He says that without any question, under all circumstances, we are bound to send our ships into the war. We take a different position, and we say:—Let the country judge between us.

"Mr. R. L. Borden—Would our ports and harbours be neutral like our fleet until an order-in-council had been passed?

"Sir Wilfrid Laurier—I do not understand what my hon. friend means by asking if they should be neutral.

"Mr. R. L. Borden—I understood the Prime Minister to say that our ships would not fight until they were ordered to do so, and, therefore, **THEY WOULD IN EFFECT BE NEUTRAL UNTIL THE GOVERNOR IN COUNCIL HAD MADE AN ORDER THAT THEY SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN THE WAR. HAVE I MIS-STATED MY HON. FRIEND'S POSITION?**

"Sir Wilfrid Laurier—NO.

"Mr. R. L. Borden—Then, inasmuch as our ships, under the conditions mentioned, will be practically neutral, I would like to know whether our ports and harbours will also be neutral in the same way?

"Sir Wilfrid Laurier—I do not understand what my hon. friend means by asking if they would be neutral. If he means after an enemy has come into our harbour, then it will be time to resist them with our fleet.

"Mr. R. L. Borden—But if our ships do not attack the enemy when they meet the enemy on the high seas, on the same principle may not the enemy's fleet come into our harbour without resistance or attack, without fear of aggression? Surely, that can be done, if it is feasible for the country owning those harbours to maintain neutrality on the high seas.

"Sir Wilfrid Laurier—**THAT WOULD BE A QUESTION TO DETERMINE ANY TIME THAT A WARSHIP ENTERED A CANADIAN PORT.**

"Mr. R. L. Borden—The position of the Prime Minister is that ships flying the British flag should meet an enemy on the high seas and not attack them. **THAT IS A NEW TRADITION FOR THE BRITISH NAVY.**" (Hansard, 1909-10, pp. 7461-62.)

All this time the words which tumbled most freely from the lips of Sir Wilfrid Laurier were the words, "autonomy," "neutrality." They meant "independence," "separation."

An Insidious Move

This is well understood by some Liberals and accepted by some Liberals. When the Laurier Government created the Department of External Affairs, the Toronto "Globe" voiced its approval, and based it upon the ground that the step taken was an insidious move toward Canadian independence.

The "Globe" said:—

"The direction and progress of national evolution thus indicated may be too fast for some, and not fast enough for others, but there need be no mistake about the fact of our progress in its direction.

"**THE ANSWER TO THOSE WHO ARE IMPATIENT FOR INDEPENDENCE IS THAT OUR DIRECTION IS THAT WAY, BUT THAT IT IS ON THE WHOLE BETTER THAT IT SHOULD BE SO SLOW AS TO ATTRACT LITTLE ATTENTION AND TO CAUSE NO IRRITATION.**"

Sir Wilfrid Laurier has never lost sight of what he once declared to be "the goal of my aspiration."

Thrown out of office after another effort to bind the Dominion by commercial ties to the United States, he became more bitterly resolved and more openly active in his war on the British connection. When the Borden Government, aware of the grave danger then threatening the Empire from Germany, and after consultation with the Admiralty, offered three Canadian dreadnoughts to increase the effective naval forces of the Empire, Laurier engaged in a struggle which every Canadian will long remember.

He scoffed at the Admiralty memorandum.

He ridiculed the idea of an emergency.

He fought the Naval Aid Bill through every stage in the House of Commons.

He caused his partisan majority in the Senate to kill it.

He encouraged Germany.

He forced the Admiralty to supply the additional ships which Canada was to have given.

Because of his action, the Dominion of Canada is today without the means of playing the part that should be played by a great people in fighting for the Empire on the sea.

Australia is there.

New Zealand is there.

A Discreditable Record

Look again at Laurier's record:—Opposed Confederation; endorsed the rebellion of Riel; was a party to the annexationist commercial union policy of 1891; advocated separation from Britain in the United States in 1891 and in parliament in 1892; attempted to block Canada's assistance to the Empire during the South African War; opposed any naval aid in 1902 and 1907; his naval policy of 1910 was a separatist policy; his trade policy of 1911 was an annexationist policy and his naval opposition of 1912 was a deliberate attempt to break away from the Empire.

This is the man who seeks again to be made Prime Minister of Canada, entrusted with the destinies of the Dominion, the accredited mouthpiece of the Canadian people.

It is good for the honour of Canada and good for the welfare of the Empire that Laurier was not allowed to "finish his work."

But it is bad for Germany.

Appendices

Public Statement by Sir Wilfrid Laurier, given by him to the Toronto Globe," and published on page one of that newspaper on October 4th, 1899, in reference to the disinclination of the then Liberal Government to send Troops to South Africa, at outbreak of Boer War.

"There exists a great deal of misconception in the country regarding the powers of the Government in the present crisis. As I understand the Militia Act, and I may say that I have given it some study of late, our volunteers are enrolled to be used in the defence of the Dominion. They are Canadian troops to be used to fight for Canada's defence. Perhaps the most widespread misapprehension is that they cannot be sent out of Canada. To my mind it is clear that cases might arise when they might be sent to a foreign land to fight. To postulate a case: Suppose that Spain should declare war upon Great Britain. Spain has, or had a navy, and that navy might be being got ready to assail Canada as part of the Empire. Sometimes the best method of defending one's self is to attack, and in that case Canadian soldiers might certainly be sent to Spain, and it is quite certain that they legally might be so despatched to the Iberian Peninsula. **The case of the South African Republic is not analogous.**

"There is no menace to Canada, and although we may be willing to contribute troops, I DO NOT SEE HOW WE CAN DO SO. Then again how could we do so without Parliament granting us the money? WE SIMPLY COULD NOT DO ANYTHING. In other words we should have to summon Parliament. The Government of Canada is restricted in its powers. It is responsible to Parliament, and it can do very little without the permission of Parliament. There is no doubt as to the attitude of the Government on all questions that mean menace to British interests, but in this present case our limitations are very clearly defined, and so it is that we have not offered a contingent to the Home Authorities. The Militia Department duly transmitted individual offers to the Imperial Government and the reply from the War Office, as published in Saturday's Globe, shows their attitude in the question. As to Canada furnishing a

contingent, THE GOVERNMENT HAS NOT DISCUSSED THE QUESTION FOR THE REASONS WHICH I HAVE STATED—reasons which, I think, must easily be understood by everyone who understands the constitutional law on the question. The statement in the *Military Gazette** published this morning is a pure invention. Far from possessing any foundation in fact, it is purely imaginative."

Statement which appeared in the *Military Gazette*, published in Toronto, which was reproduced on Page One of the *Toronto Globe* on October 3rd, 1899, and which drew the foregoing reply from Sir Wilfrid Laurier.

*"If war should be commenced in the Transvaal—which seems most probable—the offer of a force from the Canadian Militia for service will be made by the Canadian Government."

Editorial leader which appeared in the *Toronto "Globe"* on October 7th, 1899, in defence of the refusal of the Government of Sir Wilfrid Laurier to send Troops to South Africa.

"For not immediately and without Parliamentary authority taking measures to despatch a Canadian contingent to South Africa, the Government is being subjected to criticism, which, upon examination, will be found to be unwarranted. We may dismiss from consideration as unworthy of serious reply, the charge that the Premier is slow to act because he is a French Canadian. That is a charge which obviously strikes not only at him, but at one-third of the people of Canada; and it would hardly be conducive to general belief in the strength and unity of the Empire to have it go abroad that such a cleavage exists in the Dominion on a question affecting Imperial interests. The question is not one to be discussed on personal grounds. The money which it is proposed to expend is not the money of the members of the Government, but of the people of Canada, and the lives to be risked are in the main the lives of men who have little or nothing to do in deciding what steps shall be taken.

"Now it would be a serious step for the Government, without the sanction of Parliament, to undertake to send a Canadian contingent to Africa, and the gravity is not wholly, or indeed mainly, a matter of expense. The British Empire has for many years had on its hands wars of a minor character, wars in which the safety, honor and integrity of the Empire were not regarded as being at stake, but which were recognized as being incidents in the government and growth of possessions extending all over the globe. But no such step as is now proposed has been hitherto taken. We say this with recognition of what was done in the case of the Crimean War, and of what was done by the Canadian voyageurs in the Soudan.

"What is now proposed is certainly a new departure, involving important considerations, and the question whether that departure is to be taken without the consent of Parliament is not to be disposed of with a

sneer. It is competent for us, of course, to take a new departure in that respect; but it is a very grave question indeed whether a Government should take that departure without consulting the representatives of the people. And certainly nothing was said in Parliament which would warrant such a step. Parliament on the eve of prorogation dealt with the matter and seemed to rest satisfied with expressing sympathy with the Uitlanders. Nothing was said about conferring any emergency power on the Government, although it was known that Parliament would be prorogued in a few days. Sir Mackenzie Bowell, although in favor of rendering material aid if necessary, assumed that the consent of Parliament would be asked.

"What we have said, will, we think, show that the right of the Government to deal with the matter without the consent of Parliament is quite doubtful. The safety of the Empire is not, so far as we know, menaced any more than it was in the very extensive war in India two years ago, and in the Soudan a year ago.

"We do not lay down the rule that there ought to be no assistance rendered by the Colonies even in these cases. But it can at least be reasonably maintained that before such a departure is taken Parliament ought to be consulted."

Sir Charles Tupper's Message of October 5th, 1909, to Sir Wilfrid Laurier, Pledging the Conservative Party to Support the Sending of a Canadian Contingent to South Africa.

"His Majesty's Government at this moment are engaged in endeavouring to secure the just rights of our fellow-countrymen, the British subjects in the Transvaal, and in order to accomplish that, they may be driven into a struggle with that country. I believe that the Government of Canada only correctly interpreted the sentiment of the people of Canada when they unanimously passed a resolution expressing their sympathy and the hope that their grievances would be overcome. I believe they will be correctly interpreting the sentiment of the people of Canada if they avail themselves of every means for enlisting a regiment of stalwart Canadians to bear arms for His Majesty's Government should it need them. I believe that the Government would only be interpreting the sentiment of the people of Canada if they were to equip a regiment of 1,000 or 1,200 strong, and deliver them in England at the service of His Majesty. Should the present Government adopt that important step, they can rely upon the hearty co-operation of myself and the Conservative opposition of the House of Commons, as they have been able to rely on it on every occasion where the interests of our country have demanded it."